

Man with rare blood group undergoes life-saving op

Mumbai:Rajesh Agarwal (50), a lawyer from Yavatmal, was overwhelmed when diagnosed with a tumour in his heart two months back. What he didn't know then was that his run-in with "rare health conditions" had just begun.

When he came to Mumbai for tumour removal surgery, cardiothoracic surgeon Dr Pavan Kumar found he had several blockages in his heart — a rare co-existence of tumours and blockages.

However, the run-up to the twin surgery revealed the rarest condition Agarwal has: a blood group, named Gerbich Phenotype, discovered for the first time in India. Just a day before surgery, doctors in Lilavati Hospital, Bandra, found they couldn't get a match for Agarwal's blood. They tested the blood with 50 donors, including some family members, but failed to get a match.

Dr Ruhi Mehra, consultant in transfusion medicine, said "To gain insight into this rare abnormality, we sent the patient's blood sample to the International Blood Group Reference Laboratory in Bristol, the UK."

It confirmed that the patient's cells had the rare Gerbich Phenotype due to which the patient had formed a clinically significant anti-Ge2 allo-antibody. "We were told only eight same blood group phenotype donors are registered in the international rare blood group donor registry. This made it likely Agarwal's case was the first of its kind in India," said Dr Mehra.

Dr Kumar said myxoma or heart tumors are known to generate antibodies in blood. "It is possible alloantibodies were also released by the myxoma," he said. He decided that the patient's own blood could be used for any transfusion needed during surgery. "This would prevent any potential complications from mismatched transfusions," he added.

Over three weeks, the hospital collected three units of the patient's blood ahead of the surgery on October 18.

"I am grateful that doctors and staff at Lilavati Hospital found a suitable treatment. They collected my own blood for a successful transfusion and gave me a new lease on life," Agarwal said on Friday.